

HEALTH, WELLBEING & ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 25th November, 2024
Time of Commencement: 7.00 pm

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Present:	Councillor Rupert Adcock (Chair)		
Councillors:	Barker MBE Brown Crisp Dymond	Northcott Reece Richards Whieldon	Wilkes Wright
Officers:	Nesta Barker Andrew Bird Craig Jordan	Service Director - Regulatory Services Service Director - Sustainable Environment Service Director - Planning	
Also in attendance:	Councillor Gill Heesom Councillor David Hutchison	Portfolio Holder - Community Safety and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder - Sustainable Environment	

1. **APOLOGIES**

All members were present.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Cllr Northcott declared being in charge of the Public Health and Integrated Care Cabinet portfolio at the County Council.

3. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

Cllr Northcott commented that his declaration of interest as stated above hadn't been recorded at the last meeting of the Committee.

This would be investigated by officers.

Resolved: That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 16th September 2024 be agreed as a true and accurate record subject to item 2 being re-checked and reflecting information shared by members.

4. **STAFFORDSHIRE HEALTH AND CARE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Resolved: That the update report received from Staffordshire County Council be noted.

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5. WALLEYS QUARRY ODOUR ISSUE

The Service Director for Regulatory Services presented the report on Walleys Quarry including complaints figures compared to air quality data.

Members raised questions and responses were provided as follows.

Cllr Whieldon asked about the origin of the terms “best practical means” used in paragraph 2.5.

The Service Director for Regulatory Services advised that these were defined in the legislation i.e. the Environment Protection Act and were a defence against causing statutory nuisances.

Cllr Whieldon expressed her concerns about the subjectivity of the expression which could be abused by lawyers.

The Service Director for Regulatory Services responded that ultimately it would be up to the Courts to decide but it was something to be mindful of in terms of operational practices and how it compared to national and international guidelines regarding what was reasonable at a landfill site.

Cllr Brown reported reading that the highest levels of complaints in the last four years were recorded this October and asked if there was a correlation with explanations provided by the operator.

The Service Director for Regulatory Services advised that there had been improvements on the site over the past four years such as capping however the gas emissions, odour events and high levels of hydrogen sulphites were still recorded and as such the Council considered there had been a breach of the abatement notice. While the site conditions had changed, the outcomes were still the same.

Cllr Whieldon expressed doubts over the consistency of the government in relation to paragraphs 2.7, 2.11 and 2.12.

The Chair referred to the complaints data recorded by the Environment Agency in paragraph 2.1 and asked if there was a correlation between these and the figures recorded by the Council as well as if non-residents visiting Newcastle were able to complain given the requirement to live in the borough to create an account and log on to the website.

The Service Director for Regulatory Services responded that more people would usually report to the Environment Agency as principal regulator however there was a category of people who would only complain to the Council the same way some others would only do so with the former. About non-residents who were unable to register there were two ways for them to raise complaints, the first one being through their own local Council and the second one being by using the customer service portal messaging system.

The Chair suggested that the various ways to contact the Council and the Environment Agency about the odours be advertised again considering the likelihood of further incidents throughout the winter.

Cllr Richards asked why people needed to create an account and log on to formally complain, as these could discourage them from doing it.

The Service Director for Regulatory Services advised that it was important to be able to verify people's address and that once registered the account would track former complaints and make things easier for residents rather than the other way around.

Cllr Whieldon wished to thank the officer for clarifying the way non residents could register complaints which she would advertise going forward.

Resolved: That the contents of the update report be received.

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6. **OPTIONS FOR SCRUTINY REVIEW OF PARKS**

The Service Director for Sustainable Environment presented the report on scrutiny review options in relation to the Council's parks and open spaces provisions as requested by the Committee at the last meeting.

Members raised questions and responses were provided as follows.

Cllr Brown welcomed the report and the opportunity for a task and finish working group which she would want to join. She asked if there were any plans for the Parade Pavilion that had been left unused and was ground for antisocial behaviour as well as if some support towards the Parade Park could be considered given the substantial investment from Silverdale Parish Council.

The Service Director for Sustainable Environment advised that there were currently no money for the Parade Pavilion but the suggestion would be discussed with the portfolio holder. The Parade Park as for itself could be included in the list of neighbourhood parks to look into as part of the Plan.

Cllr Wright enquired about parks that had been awarded green flag status.

The Service Director for Sustainable Environment responded that Lime Valleys, Queen's Gardens and Bradwell were among them.

A full list was confirmed as follows: Wolstanton Park, Brampton Park, Queen's Gardens, Lyme Valley Parkway, Bradwell Crematorium and Keele Cemetery.

Cllr Whieldon congratulated the team as well as the Council for protecting the green and open spaces and parklands so that development can come after that. She noted that there were, however very few litter bins and wondered if an audit could be undertaken.

The Service Director for Sustainable Environment replied that the bins were under constant review. The bin emptying and availability assessment was carried out by street scene services. Adding new litter bins had a cost in terms of equipment and maintenance and the review was notably looking into moving existing bins locations as required. The opportunity of combining dog waste and regular bins was also being considered.

Cllr Whieldon reiterated the need for the number of bins to be also reviewed.

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Cllr Reece wondered if thought could be given to retaining old dog bins alongside putting up multi-use ones.

The Service Director for Sustainable Environment responded this would depend on design considerations.

Cllr Reece enquired about buildings in his wards that were well used and financially viable despite being eyesores and if there were any plans to upgrade them.

The Service Director for Sustainable Environment said there were currently no capital funding towards that purpose at the moment but sports clubs were well positioned to apply for grants and the Council could help facilitate things.

Cllr Dymond asked about refurbishment at Clough Hall Park and whether there were any plans to re-open the closed area that the Borough would look into perhaps opening a café or if this would need to be a community led initiative.

The Service Director for Sustainable Environment advised that the Council wouldn't be running a café and this would need to be a community solution with local ownership which the Council could do its best to support.

Cllr Barker expressed her enthusiasm at the idea of involving communities and businesses to look for fundings for which she successfully provided assistance over the years.

Cllr Richards asked about recycling in the parks.

The Service Director for Sustainable Environment responded that while people were getting good at separating things at home it was exceptionally difficult to get them to recycle on the go. A deposit return scheme had however been initiated by the Government in 2018 as part of its Resource and Waste Strategy, and would likely be the answer when launched in 2027.

The Chair concluded the discussion which had been about maintenance of the parks by bringing members attention to the need to determine what would be the focus of the Task & Finish Working Group to be set up, which should be as specific and manageable as possible. Section 2 of the report was providing suggestions.

Cllr Richards suggested that the review of current play areas provisions would be important especially regarding tackling child obesity, which the Chair supported.

Cllr Reece commented on enhanced biodiversity in which local schools and colleges could be involved.

The Service Director for Sustainable Environment responded that the Grassland Strategy would address these could be brought back to scrutiny. Suggestions could be made by members based on the report.

Cllr Brown wished to endorse the idea of making suggestions based on the review of parks made by officers and the need for proper funding.

The Service Director for Sustainable Environment commented that play areas in particular required a substantial maintenance budget along with regular reviews to ensure the equipment was and remained fit for purpose.

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Based on officers' recommendations the Chair proposed that a task and finish working group be set to review play park provision and options for the future including potential funding arrangements as per paragraph 2.4 of the report.

Cllr Richards seconded the proposal and all agreed.

Members who wished to volunteer and join the group were invited to liaise with the Service Director for Sustainable Environment.

- Resolved:**
1. That the report be received.
 2. That a task and finish working group be set up to review play park provision and options for the future including funding arrangements.

[Watch the debate here](#)

7. TREE RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Service Director for Sustainable Environment presented the report on the Tree Management Risk Strategy as agreed at a former meeting of the Committee when the Tree Planting Strategy was adopted.

Members raised questions and responses were provided as follows.

Cllr Reece enquired about the tree that fell over the weekend in Medley and the priority level associated with works that were to be undertaken.

The Service Director for Sustainable Environment advised that the tree had been identified as to be felled and was in the red zone. The local community had expressed an interest in re-using the tree for sculpting.

Cllr Reece wondered if there was a way to determine where the responsibilities lied in terms of works to be carried out in relation to specific trees.

The Service Director for Sustainable Environment responded that these were shared between the Highways, Borough, housing associations and health services depending on who owned the trees. The County Council was currently looking into pulling together their own tree strategy, which is what any organisation should do for the trees in their possession.

Cllr Reece asked if the Management Strategy would record TPOs (Tree Preservation Orders) on private land.

The Service Director for Sustainable Environment replied that it would only address trees on the Council land although those trees would still fall under the Council's responsibility under a different system.

Cllr Whieldon and Cllr Brown commended the report.

- Resolved:**
1. That the contents of the report be noted.
 2. That the Health, Wellbeing and Environment Scrutiny Committee ask Cabinet to adopt the Tree Risk Management Strategy as set out in the report.

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8. WORK PROGRAMME

Cllr Reece reiterated his interest for allotment waiting lists and availability.

Resolved: That the work programme be noted.

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9. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There had been no questions received from members of the public.

10. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Resolved: That the next meeting be held on 3rd March 2025.

**Councillor Rupert Adcock
Chair**

Meeting concluded at 8.06 pm